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It now looks like sports will be played with no fans in stands.
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HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Megadonor leads secret economic task force

Patrick still silent on who else serves on panel to restart Texas businesses and group's focus

By Jay Root
STAFF WRITER

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's suggestion last month that he and other senior citizens would be willing to risk exposure to the coronavirus to get the economy back on its feet sparked headlines – and outrage – around the globe.

But the details of just how Patrick wants to jump start commerce in Texas, and who all is advising him on it, remains a state secret – with one notable exception, that is.

Ryan

Patrick announced last week that G. Brint Ryan, a multimillionaire Dallas businessman and Donald Trump ally, would lead his "Task Force To Re-Start the Economy."

Who else is on it? What's the focus? Why all the secrecy?

Patrick's office didn't respond to numerous requests for more detail about his task force.

In the meantime, government watchdogs say Ryan, a Republican megadonor whose company specializes in reducing tax bills and getting economic development grants for big corporations, could benefit from his elevation to the head of Patrick's quietly assembled task force.

Ryan denies that and insists his goal is to stabilize and revive the economy, particularly for small businesses.

The tension about who stands to gain from government recovery efforts mirrors a debate in Washington, where the lack of oversight and transparency of coronavirus-related spending is leading to concerns that the mon-

Megadonor continues on A6

Patton Village officer fights COVID-19 — and wins

Brett Coomer / Staff photographer

Patton Village police Lt. Chris Hernandez walks out of CHI St. Luke's Health in The Woodlands on Wednesday.

He spent five weeks in the hospital, 15 days on a ventilator. Now he's home.

By Emily Foxhall
STAFF WRITER

Chris Hernandez felt warm. The Patton Village police lieutenant had been fighting an illness for about a week. He headed upstairs to take a cold bath.

At the top of the stairs, Hernandez paused to catch his breath. He looked back down the stairwell.

"What's wrong with me?" he wondered. He gasped for air, as if he were drowning.

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For the latest updates, go to
houstonchronicle.com/coronavirus

Two weeks earlier, the married father of three had taken time off to work extra jobs. He went to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo cook-off, then came down with a fever.

Hernandez didn't realize that what he was fighting – the new coronavirus – would bring him close to death. His case would be first to reveal the virus was spreading in the community, with some people not knowing how they got it. It would

Officer continues on A6

Damage to economy mounts as cases rise

Shops in other nations reopen to few customers

By Christopher Rugaber, Paul Wiseman and Kelli Kennedy
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON – Economic damage to the U.S. from the coronavirus piled up Wednesday as sluggish sales at reopened stores in Europe and China made it clear that business won't necessarily bounce right back when the crisis eases.

With many factories shut down, American industrial output shriveled in March, registering its biggest decline since the U.S. demobilized in 1946 at the end of World War II. Retail sales fell an unprecedented 8.7 percent, with April expected to be far worse.

Worldwide, deaths topped 130,000 and confirmed infections rose past 2 million, according to the tally kept by Johns

Damage continues on A8

AG: Fear isn't reason to allow mail voting

Issue a 'muddled mess' as Paxton bucks judge

By Benjamin Wermund and Zach Despart
STAFF WRITERS

WASHINGTON – Just as a Texas judged opened the door to more voting by mail amid the coronavirus outbreak, the state's attorney general is trying to slam it shut.

Voters cannot cast ballots by mail just because they are afraid of getting the coronavirus at polling places, Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton said Wednesday, even as a state district judge in Austin said he will rule that voters can vote by mail if they believe doing so in person puts their health at risk.

The judge's apparent decision was an early victory for the Texas Democratic Party and a slew of civil rights and voter advocacy groups seeking to

Elections continues on A8

Stimulus checks 'help us keep the house'

Residents say funds pay bills, little else

By Erin Douglas
STAFF WRITER

Some made their mortgage payments and paid down credit card debt. Others used it for medicine or groceries. One Houstonian used it for flood insurance.

As taxpayers this week begin to receive payments promised by the $2 trillion stimulus package, the vast majority are using it for emergency and necessary expenses. Jamie and William Clifford of Katy, neither of whom are working now, received $3,400 from the government toward their struggle to keep up with expenses, including more than $5,000 a month for medical care for one their two children.

The money went to pay the mortgage.

"It helps us keep the house, but we still have to pay utilities and everything," Jamie Clifford said. "It's just not going to be enough."

Many Houstonians find

Stimulus continues on A8

Marie D. De Jesús / Staff photographer

Jamie Clifford plays with her daughter Phoenix at home in Katy. She used her stimulus check to pay the mortgage.

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